

# Theism

**Theism** is broadly defined as the belief in the existence of a supreme being or deities.<sup>[1][2]</sup> In common parlance, or when contrasted with *deism*, the term often describes the classical conception of God that is found in monotheism (also referred to as classical theism) – or gods found in polytheistic religions—a belief in God or in gods without the rejection of revelation as is characteristic of deism.<sup>[3][4]</sup>

Atheism is commonly understood as non-acceptance or rejection of theism in the broadest sense of theism, i.e. non-acceptance or rejection of belief in God or gods.<sup>[5]</sup> The claim that the existence of any deity is unknown or unknowable is agnosticism.<sup>[6][7]</sup>



God the Father depicted by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld in 1860

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## Etymology

The term *theism* derives from the Greek *theos* or *theoi* meaning "god" or "gods". The term *theism* was first used by Ralph Cudworth (1617–1688).<sup>[8]</sup> In Cudworth's definition, they are "strictly and properly called Theists, who affirm, that a perfectly conscious understanding being, or mind, existing of itself from eternity, was the cause of all other things".<sup>[9]</sup>

## Types of theism

### Monotheism

Monotheism (from Greek μόνος) is the belief in theology that only one deity exists.<sup>[10]</sup> Some modern day monotheistic religions include Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Bahá'í Faith, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Arya samaj (hinduism) and Eckankar.

## Polytheism

Polytheism is the belief that there is more than one god.<sup>[11]</sup> In practice, polytheism is not just the belief that there are multiple gods; it usually includes belief in the existence of a specific pantheon of distinct deities.

Within polytheism there are *hard* and *soft* varieties:

- Hard polytheism views the gods as being distinct and separate beings; an example of this would be certain schools of Hinduism as well as Hellenismos, Greek, and Egyptian religions.
- Soft polytheism views the gods as being subsumed into a greater whole. Some other forms of Hinduism such as Smartism/Dvaita Vedanta serve as examples of soft polytheism.

Polytheism is also divided according to how the individual deities are regarded:

- Henotheism: The viewpoint/belief that there may be more than one deity, but only one of them is worshiped. Zoroastrianism is an example.
- Kathenotheism: The viewpoint/belief that there is more than one deity, but only one deity is worshiped at a time or ever, and another may be worthy of worship at another time or place. If they are worshiped one at a time, then each is supreme in turn.
- Monolatry: The belief that there may be more than one deity, but that only one is worthy of being worshiped. Most of the modern monotheistic religions may have begun as monolatric ones, although this is disputed.

## Pantheism and panentheism

- Pantheism: The belief that the universe is equivalent to god, and that there is no division between a Creator and the substance of its creation.<sup>[12]</sup> The Advaita Vedanta school of Hindu philosophy is an example of this; the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza has historically also been closely identified with this position, though there is some controversy over whether he is in fact better described as a panentheist.
- Panentheism: Like Pantheism, the belief that the physical universe is joined to a god or gods. However, it also believes that the divine pervades and interpenetrates every part of the universe and also extends beyond time and space. Examples include most forms of Vaishnavism and the philosophies of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Alfred North Whitehead.

The distinction between these two beliefs may be ambiguous and unhelpful, or a significant point of division.<sup>[13]</sup> Pantheism may be understood a type of Nontheism, where the physical universe takes on some of the roles of a theistic God, and other roles of God viewed as unnecessary.<sup>[14]</sup>

## Deism

- Classical Deism is the belief that one God exists and created the world, but that the Creator does not alter the original plan for the universe, but presides over it in the form of Providence; however, some classical Deists did believe in divine intervention.<sup>[15]</sup>

Deism typically rejects supernatural events (such as prophecies, miracles, and divine revelations) prominent in organized religion. Instead, Deism holds that religious beliefs must be founded on human reason and observed features of the natural world, and that these sources reveal the existence of a supreme being as creator.<sup>[16]</sup>

- Pandeism: The belief that God preceded the universe and created it, but is now equivalent with it.
- Polydeism: The belief that multiple gods exist, but do not intervene in the universe.

## Autotheism

Autotheism is the viewpoint that divinity, whether also external or not, is inherently within 'oneself' and that one has the ability to become godlike. Indian religions like Buddhism and Jainism are Autotheistic. This can be in a selfless way, a way following the implications of statements attributed to ethical, philosophical, and religious leaders (such as Mahavira<sup>[17]</sup>).

Autotheism can also refer to the belief that one's self is a deity, within the context of subjectivism. Hindus use the term, "aham Brahṁāsmi" which means, "I am Brahman".<sup>[18]</sup>

Mormons teach a type of Autotheism called Apotheosis, where humans can attain godhood.<sup>[19]</sup>

## Value-judgment theisms

- Eutheism is the belief that a deity is wholly benevolent.
- Dystheism is the belief that a deity is not wholly good, and is possibly evil.
- Maltheism is the belief that a deity exists, but is wholly malicious.
- Misotheism is active hatred for God or gods.

## Non-theism

- Non-theism is the belief in no gods or god.

## Atheism

- Atheism is the belief that no supernatural powers such as deities, gods/goddesses, or messiahs exist or ever existed.

## See also

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- Antitheism
- Apeirotheism
- Āstika and nāstika
- Theistic evolution

## Notes

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1. "theism," (<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/theism?>) *Dictionary.com*. Retrieved 2016-10-21.

2. "theism," (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theism>) *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Retrieved 2011-03-18.
3. "Dictionary.com Online Dictionary" (<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/theism?s=t>). Retrieved 2016-10-21.
4. "Dictionary.com Online Dictionary" (<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/deism?s=t>). Retrieved 2016-11-23.
5.
  - Nielsen, Kai (2010). "Atheism" (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/40634/atheism>). *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved 2011-01-26. "Atheism, in general, the critique and denial of metaphysical beliefs in God or spiritual beings.... Instead of saying that an atheist is someone who believes that it is false or probably false that there is a God, a more adequate characterization of atheism consists in the more complex claim that to be an atheist is to be someone who rejects belief in God for the following reasons (which reason is stressed depends on how God is being conceived)..."
  - Edwards, Paul (2005) [1967]. "Atheism". In Donald M. Borchert (ed.). *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Vol. 1 (2nd ed.). MacMillan Reference USA (Gale). p. 359. ISBN 9780028657806. "On our definition, an 'atheist' is a person who rejects belief in God, regardless of whether or not his reason for the rejection is the claim that 'God exists' expresses a false proposition. People frequently adopt an attitude of rejection toward a position for reasons other than that it is a false proposition. It is common among contemporary philosophers, and indeed it was not uncommon in earlier centuries, to reject positions on the ground that they are meaningless. Sometimes, too, a theory is rejected on such grounds as that it is sterile or redundant or capricious, and there are many other considerations which in certain contexts are generally agreed to constitute good grounds for rejecting an assertion."(page 175 in 1967 edition)
6. Hepburn, Ronald W. (2005) [1967]. "Agnosticism". In Donald M. Borchert (ed.). *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Vol. 1 (2nd ed.). MacMillan Reference USA (Gale). p. 92. ISBN 9780028657806. "In the most general use of the term, agnosticism is the view that we do not know whether there is a God or not." (page 56 in 1967 edition)
7. Rowe, William L. (1998). "Agnosticism" (<https://books.google.com/books?id=VQ-GhVWTH84C&pg=PA122>). In Edward Craig (ed.). *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Taylor & Francis. ISBN 978-0-415-07310-3. "In the popular sense, an agnostic is someone who neither believes nor disbelieves in God, whereas an atheist disbelieves in God. In the strict sense, however, agnosticism is the view that human reason is incapable of providing sufficient rational grounds to justify either the belief that God exists or the belief that God does not exist. In so far as one holds that our beliefs are rational only if they are sufficiently supported by human reason, the person who accepts the philosophical position of agnosticism will hold that neither the belief that God exists nor the belief that God does not exist is rational."
8. Halsey, William; Robert H. Blackburn; Sir Frank Francis (1969). Louis Shores (ed.). *Collier's Encyclopedia*. Vol. 22 (20 ed.). Crowell-Collier Educational Corporation. pp. 266–7.
9. Cudworth, Ralph (1678). *The True Intellectual System of the Universe, Vol. I*. New York: Gould & Newman, 1837, p. 267.
10. "Monotheism", in *Britannica*, 15th ed. (1986), 8:266.
11. "polytheism" ([http://www.askoxford.com/concise\\_oed/polytheism](http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/polytheism)). *AskOxford*.
12. "Philosophical Dictionary: Pacifism-Particular" (<http://www.philosophypages.com/dy/p.htm#pant>).
13. "What is Panentheism?" ([http://atheism.about.com/library/FAQs/religion/blrel\\_theism\\_panen.htm](http://atheism.about.com/library/FAQs/religion/blrel_theism_panen.htm)). About.Com: Agnosticism/Atheism. Retrieved 2011-03-18.

14. Levine, Michael P. (1994). *Pantheism : a non-theistic concept of deity* (1. publ. ed.). London u.a.: Routledge. ISBN 0415070643.
  15. AskOxford: deism ([http://www.askoxford.com/concise\\_oed/deism](http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/deism))
  16. Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language (G. & C. Merriam, 1924) defines deism as "belief in the existence of a personal god, with disbelief in Christian teaching, or with a purely rationalistic interpretation of Scripture". Although listed as a type of theism, deism is completely different from theism. If anything, theism would be an off-shoot of deism since it takes beliefs a step further to include miracles and divine revelation, with deism being the "base" belief in God.
  17. Jain, Mahavir (1976), "Neutron Experiments at Lampf" (<https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-7204-0481-4.50063-0>), *Few Body Dynamics*, Elsevier, pp. 215–219, doi:10.1016/b978-0-7204-0481-4.50063-0 (<https://doi.org/10.1016%2Fb978-0-7204-0481-4.50063-0>), ISBN 978-0-7204-0481-4, retrieved 2020-11-10
  18. Gurumayum Ranjit Sharma (1987). *The Idealistic Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=ORYOsJHi53sC&pg=PA180>). Atlantic. p. 180. GGKEY:PSWXE5NTFF4.
  19. *An Introduction to Mormonism* ([https://www.google.com/books/edition/An\\_Introduction\\_to\\_Mormonism/fw8DlziwEDsC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=apotheosis+mormon&pg=PA79&printsec=frontcover](https://www.google.com/books/edition/An_Introduction_to_Mormonism/fw8DlziwEDsC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=apotheosis+mormon&pg=PA79&printsec=frontcover)). p. 79. ISBN 9780521817387. Retrieved 2022-03-16 – via Google Books.
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